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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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DEFENDANTS FOUND GUILTY OF RICO CHARGES

Baltimore, Maryland - Thomas M. DiBiagio, United States Attorney for the District of Maryland, announced that a jury had returned guilty verdicts today against James Elmer Gross Sr., age 44, of Abingdon Maryland, James Elmer Gross Jr., age 26, of Baltimore, Maryland, Ronald Eddie, age 25, of Baltimore, Maryland, James Earl Feaster, age 44, of Baltimore Maryland, and James Donald Wilkes, age 34, of Baltimore, Maryland, in a federal racketeering case.

James Gross Sr. was convicted of Racketeering, Conspiracy to Distribute Heroin and Cocaine, Arson of Strawberry's 5000 Nightclub, and Witness Tampering. James Gross Jr. was convicted of Racketeering, Conspiracy to Distribute Heroin and Cocaine, Conspiracy to Commit Murder, Arson of a vehicle, Arson of Strawberry's 5000 Nightclub, and Witness Tampering, among other charges. Ronald Eddie was convicted of Racketeering, Conspiracy to Distribute Heroin and Cocaine, and Arson of Strawberry's 5000 Nightclub. James Feaster was convicted of Conspiracy to Commit Racketeering, and Money Laundering. James Wilkes was convicted of Assault with Intent to Commit Serious Bodily Injury, and of being a Felon in Possession of a Firearm.

The defendants were indicted in April 2002 as members of a violent racketeering enterprise

led by James Gross Sr.. The indictment was the result of an extensive investigation that began with the January 27, 2001, arson at Strawberry's 5000, a popular nightclub that had been operated for two years by Gross Sr. and Louis Colvin. Testimony from cooperating coconspirators, including Mr. Colvin, and voluminous documentary evidence, along with evidence from various related state arrests of the defendants, established that the Gross racketeering organization engaged in an unusually varied pattern of criminal offenses to preserve its territory and power and financially enrich its members, including narcotics trafficking, witness tampering, attempted murders and assault, mail fraud, arson, and armed robbery.

In addition to the verdicts listed above, James Gross Sr. and James Gross Jr. were found guilty of committing various crimes in furtherance of the racketeering enterprise: James Gross Sr. was found guilty of engaging in the distribution of heroin in February 1999; James Gross Jr. was found guilty of committing an armed robbery in September 2001, and attempting to commit two murders, one in November 2000 against an individual by the name of Peter Williams who had previously assaulted James Gross Sr. at Strawberry's 5000, and the second in September 2001 against Louis William Colvin, who was Gross Sr.'s partner in the racketeering enterprise.

As a result of the verdicts returned today, defendants Feaster and Wilkes are each facing a maximum of twenty years imprisonment; defendants Gross Sr., Gross Jr., and Eddie are facing maximum penalties of life imprisonment. The defendants are scheduled to be sentenced by the Honorable J. Frederick Motz on May 9, 2002 at 9:30AM.

This case was investigated by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and the Baltimore City and County Fire and Police Departments. The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Robert R. Harding and Christine Manuelian.